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Letter No. 2298

February 5, 1987

USSR BUYING
ACTIVITY

After a period of relatively quiet, the USSR, which is expected to import 12 million tons of wheat in 1986/87, began purchasing large quantities of wheat during the past month. France was the most active seller, selling 2 million tons, bringing total French sales to the USSR to over 3 million tons. Also reported were sales of 1 million tons of U.K. and German wheat and 500,000 tons of Argentine new crop wheat. Total EC sales to the USSR in 1986/87 are estimated to be in the region of 5 million tons.

EXPORT WHEAT
FORECAST

The U.S. wheat export forecast for 1986/87 remains unchanged from the previous month at 26 million 500 thousand tons, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This is about 6 pct. greater than last year's total wheat shipments, the difference being largely due to the Export Enhancement Program. However, U.S. wheat exports remain in a very depressed state. There are signs that the low world wheat prices are beginning to increase budgetary pressures on producer countries, including Australia and Canada.

CORN FORECAST

The U.S. corn export forecast for 1986/87, as of Jan. 15, remains unchanged at 28 million 800 thousand tons, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The fact that China started buying significant amounts of corn from the U.S., and the USSR re-entered the world market soaking up some of the surplus, have stabilized markets to some degree. Since Southern Hemisphere crops are not harvested until March, there may be a window of opportunity for the U.S. to supply any major additional short-term orders for corn. The major destination for U.S. corn was Japan with 1 million 100 thousand tons, bringing cumulative shipments to 4 million 800 thousand tons, slightly ahead of last year's rate.

U.S. WHEAT
OPPORTUNITIES
IN CHINA

The announcement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture of a 1-million-ton Export Enhancement Program with China provides the U.S. an opportunity to re-enter the Chinese wheat market. The outlook for Chinese sales remains bright as wheat consumption has been accelerating rapidly, jumping from an average of 71 million 300 thousand tons in the period of 1978 to 1983, to an average of 92 million 900 thousand tons during the past 3 years. U.S. wheat exports to China fell from a peak of 8 million 700 thousand tons in 1980/81 to only 541 thousand in 1985/86, a 96 pct. reduction. This was partly as a result of keen competition from Australia, Argentina and Canada, and uncompetitive U.S. prices.

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AUSTRALIA WHEAT SALES

According to reports, the Australian Wheat Board recently sold 2 million tons of wheat to China for probable delivery during May-Sept. If confirmed, this sale would bring the total Chinese wheat purchases from Australia to 3 million 500 thousand tons in 1986/87, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1985/86, Australia shipped 2 million 700 thousand tons of wheat to China. It appears Australian new crop wheat commitments now total 10 million tons.

EGYPT'S DEMAND FOR WHEAT GROWS

The rapid growth in the Egyptian population along with the heavy subsidization of bread are likely to continue to fuel demand for wheat and wheat flour for the foreseeable future. It seems likely that Egypt will continue to import large quantities of wheat and wheat flour. This will likely benefit the United States which has been providing nearly one-third of Egypt's annual wheat import needs. Approximately half of Egypt's projected 7 million tons in wheat imports during 1986/87 are likely to be acquired under some form of trade agreement. Currently Australia and Canada have agreements with Egypt to provide annual amounts of wheat during each of the next 2-4 years.

HOW TO SPLIT A \$100 MILLION

Erosion-conscious farmers who sow less grass per acre on idle land and spray a weed killer right away could reap a bumper crop of savings for themselves and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. If farmers joining the Conservation Reserve Program apply research findings on just 6 million 500 thousand of the 45 million acres of highly erodible cropland USDA hopes to enroll, savings of \$18 an acre, or more than \$100 million could be realized. Farmers could cut seed costs by sowing two native warm-season grasses--switchgrass and big bluestem--at half or even a fourth of maximum recommended rates, then spraying atrazine before the grasses emerge. The grasses would still control erosion at the lower seeding rates. (For more info: Kenneth P. Vogel, ARS, USDA, Lincoln, Nev. 68583. Phone: 402/472-1564.)

HAVE ANOTHER EGG

Laying flocks in the 20 major egg production States produced 4 billion 990 million eggs during Dec. 1986, up 1 pct. from a year ago, according to the egg counters of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Of the eggs used for hatching, 33 million 200 thousand were for egg-type chicks; 437 million for broiler-type chicks. As of Jan. 1, turkey eggs in incubators totaled 26 million 300 thousand, 26 percent above a year earlier. Economists report turkey is now a year-round food.

FINGERPRINTING OUR NATIONAL FLOWER

A U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist is now fingerprinting roses, to distinguish one rose variety from another and to protect patents for this \$44 million-a-year industry. The scientist magnifies a rose leaf 10,000 to 20,000 times with a scanning electron microscope. A photograph of this electronic image shows that openings in the leaf, called stomata, have different shapes depending on plant variety. The subsidiary cells around the stomata can be raised or recessed...glandular hairs can be spherical with a bulb at the end or flat...and wax arrangements on leaves and thorns can be smooth, lacelike or any variation in between.

FROM OUR
TELEVISION
SERVICE

U.S. AND EC TRADE AGREEMENT...The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced a trade agreement between the United States and the European Community to compensate the U.S. for lost feed grain sales resulting from Spain and Portugal's accession to the EC. Daniel Amstutz, under secretary for International Affairs and Commodity Programs, and Deputy U.S. trade representative Allen Woods describe the major portions of the agreement. DeBoria Janifer interviews. (121)

FOREST SERVICE OBJECTIVES...Dale Robertson, focuses on new changes and objectives he hopes to accomplish as the new chief of the Department's Forest Service, and how he plans to achieve these goals. Vic Powell interviews. (122)

CURRENT RICE OUTLOOK...USDA economist Janet Livezey describes factors contributing to the current turnaround and increase in U.S. rice exports and how this situation is affecting various export markets. DeBoria Janifer interviews. (123)

WORLD FOOD AVAILABILITIES...Nutrition-based cereal needs for the 69 developing countries during 1987-88 is nearly 14 million tons, down nearly three million tons from a year ago. USDA economist Ray Nightingale focuses on these and other factors contributing to the current situation for world food needs and availabilities. Vic Powell interviews. (124)

SOYBEAN YIELD RESEARCH...Steve Farrand, a microbiologist with the University of Illinois, describes how scientists are searching for ways to help good soil microorganisms thrive in the soil to help soybean producers increase yield. Gary Beaumont interviews. (125)

FROM OUR RADIO
SERVICE

AGRICULTURE USA #1549...(Weekly 13½ min documentary)
Argentina...one of the United States' toughest agricultural competitors. Doug Wakefield talks to USDA agricultural attache Dawson Ahalt about Argentina's agriculture exports.

AGRITAPE/FARM PROGRAM REPORT #1538...(Weekly reel of news features) USDA news highlights; 1987 Acreage reduction program; Biotechnology update; U.S./European trade dispute settled; Effects of the Southeastern drought continues.

CONSUMER TIME #1031...(Weekly reel of 2½ to 3 min features)
Extinguishing burnout; Planting vegetables from seeds;
Transplants; Hunting for wood; A pollution free wood stove?

USDA RADIO NEWS SERVICE...Wed, Feb. 18, Weekly weather and crop outlook; Agricultural outlook report; Thurs, Feb. 19, Export outlook; World tobacco situation; Fri, Feb. 20, Wheat outlook; Catfish report; Livestock slaughter report. Dial the USDA National News Line 202-488-8358 or 8359. All material changed at 5 p.m. ET each working day.

OFF MIKE

As we write this, the USDA Biotechnology Challenge Forum is about to get underway. The 1-1/2 day forum is packed with high-powered experts, including one from Japan and one from the European Community. The program also has three concurrent sessions on regulation, opportunities, and communication. Each session has a "synthesizer," someone from the communication media who can put technical language into everyday, understandable lay language. Keith Kirkpatrick (WHO, Des Moines, IA) is the synthesizer for the communication session; Lane Palmer (Farm Journal editor emeritus) the opportunities session; and C. G. Scruggs (Progressive Farmer) the regulation session. An interesting task to say the least! ... On Feb. 2, Bob Zank started operating the Wisconsin Broadcasting Systems agriculture network with 18 affiliates. He's located in Fairchild, Wisconsin, and his phone number is 715-334-5891 ... Ron Hays (Oklahoma Agrinet, Oklahoma City) received the Outstanding Electronic Media Person award from the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association. Our congratulations! ... Herb Plambeck found himself in the spotlight recently when ABC-TV's "Our World" highlighted major events in 1948, including the National Plowing Matches that Herb originated and President Truman visited. So, "Our World" put Herb on the show, and the next day a number of other journalists including farm broadcasters (from at least 11 states) followed up with their own interviews ... If you happen to be in Washington, D.C. April 10, you're invited to stop by the annual Spring Communications Workshop, sponsored by Agricultural Communicators in Education and USDA's Office of Governmental and Public Affairs. It's a one-day affair, with a big concluding general session from 3:30-4:45, followed by a reception. No charge for these two concluding events. Lots of government and ag industry information people will be there. Call us for more info.

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 JAMES L. JOHNSON, Chief, Radio and Television Division

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